

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL  
TOWN COUNCIL  
PUBLIC HEARING OF APRIL 2, 2014**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Vasel said he wanted to read a letter before he called this evening's public hearing to order. He had just been at the autism awareness meeting at the RHPD. He told the Councilors that they knew that April is Autism Awareness Month. He read a letter aloud and in full from the Rocky Hill families who are touched by autism. He thanked these families for inviting him this evening and he said that it was a great experience.

Mayor Henry Vasel called the April 2, 2014 public hearing to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Those in attendance: Deputy Mayor Nadine Bell, Councilor Joe Kochanek, Councilor Bill MacDonald, Councilor Tim Moriarty, Councilor Frank Szeps and Councilor Cathy Vargas. Also present were Town Manager Barbara Gilbert and Finance Director John Mehr.

Those absent: Councilor Meg Casasanta and Councilor Guy Drapeau.

**II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**III. MOMENT OF SILENCE**

Mayor Vasel asked for a Moment of Silence.

**IV. PRESENTATION – 2014-15 PROPOSED BUDGET**

Town Manager Gilbert said as part of the transition that she was going to have Finance Director Mehr presenting the budget this evening because he will be the one working with it after July 1, 2014. Town Manager Gilbert said she will be retired at that point so she thought it would be best for Finance Director Mehr to explain this to them. Mayor Vasel thanked Town Manager Gilbert.

Finance Director Mehr thanked Town Manager Gilbert. Finance Director Mehr told the Town Council that there was a mistake in this budget presentation that they had sent to them in a PDF earlier today. He told them that this was corrected and it will be corrected on the PDF too.

Finance Director Mehr said he was present this evening to present the Town Manager's Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2014-15. The amount of this is \$70,894,850.00. This is \$4,600,000.00 over last year and it is a 7% increase overall. There is a proposed mill rate of 31. He gave the PowerPoint presentation at this time. (Please see the attachment.)

At the end of the presentation, Finance Director Mehr said they will be scheduling meetings in the coming weeks where all of the Department Heads will be coming to Council Chambers to discuss their budgets. He is looking forward to getting the budget behind them as soon as possible. He thanked the Town Council. Town Manager Gilbert thanked Finance Director Mehr.

Mayor Vasel asked Councilor Moriarty if he had a question for Finance Director Mehr. Councilor Moriarty told Finance Director Mehr that he didn't see anything in Capital Improvements with regards to the cells being done over at the RHPD. Finance Director Mehr thought they aren't scheduling this until next year. Town Manager Gilbert said some repairs have been made and those are suitable enough to buy them the time to have the cells done over in one year. These have been put off as a Priority 2 to be done the year after this coming fiscal year.

## **V. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mayor Vasel asked if anyone from the public wished to speak at this time and for them to please give their name and address for the record if they wished to. John Fagan, 48 Hunters Ridge, R.H., asked what the actual percent increase is of the mill rate for the coming year based on the budget that had just been presented. He asked if he was correct that this is 4.4 mills over 26.6 mills. Finance Director Mehr said yes to it being over 26 mills. John Fagan asked what the percent increase is. Finance Director Mehr said he didn't have this number with him and he didn't have a calculator. John Fagan said this would be more than the 7% that Finance Director Mehr had said the budget is increasing by.

Town Manager Gilbert believes that they were dealing with revenues, expenditures and what they were collecting. The leveling point for the mill rate is 28.9. The difference is between the two. She said if they kept the mill rate equal based upon the revenue that had been raised last year then this is 28.9. The increase is over and above the 28.9 mill rate mark. Mayor Vasel believes this is 2.1. He said that 28.9 mills would be the same mill rate they had paid before and the same taxes would be paid.

John Fagan said he had looked at his valuation before he came to this public hearing. There will be an 18% increase in his taxes with a 31 mill rate. Mayor Vasel asked John Fagan if his revaluation had gone up. John Fagan said his revaluation had gone down. He paid \$16,000.00 for taxes this year and it will be over \$19,000.00 if the mill rate is at 31. This will be a \$3,000.00 increase, which is about 18%. Town Manager Gilbert asked John Fagan if he had used last year's valuation and this year's. John Fagan said he used the new valuation. Town Manager Gilbert asked John Fagan if he used this for both the 26 mill rate and the 31 mill rate. John Fagan said yes. Town Manager Gilbert said the difference is that a new valuation should only have the 31 mill rate applied to it and the old valuation should have the 26 mill rate applied to it. She told John Fagan that this will give him the difference. John Fagan said he knew what he paid this year and he was telling them what it was. Town Manager Gilbert said okay. John Fagan said he was telling them what he has to pay next year based on a 31 mill rate. He asked if this would be \$31 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Town Manager Gilbert said yes. John Fagan said this is a much greater increase than a 7% budget increase.

Mayor Vassel said he thinks they are saying that the budget is going up 7% but some people's taxes might be going down. John Fagan asked Mayor Vassel if he was saying that the budget can go up 7% and his taxes can go up 18%. Mayor Vassel said he wasn't 100% sure and he told John Fagan that it was hard for him to comment on his tax bill without him seeing it. Mayor Vassel told John Fagan that he wished he could get an answer for him and he asked Finance Director Mehr if this was something that he could work on. Finance Director Mehr said yes. Mayor Vassel told John Fagan that he would see if he could get him an answer.

Town Manager Gilbert said they are anticipating that there will be people within this community whose taxes will go down, whose taxes will go up and whose taxes will stay the same. This will be based upon the type of home they have and also based on revaluation. Some taxes will exponentially go up more unfortunately based upon the value of the home. Some of the smaller homes lost a lot more in value so the taxes will substantially go down. She said unfortunately this is the outcome of the change in the economy and she said this is almost a correcting revaluation.

John Fagan said he thought this was all well and good but an 18% increase is an awful lot. Town Manager Gilbert told John Fagan that she couldn't argue with him. John Fagan asked if that was it and that he has to suffer with an 18% increase this coming year. Mayor Vassel told John Fagan no. Mayor Vassel explained that they had just been presented with the budget and the Town Council will go through this to do its due diligence. They will separate the wants from the needs. He referred to John Fagan's specific situation and he asked him to contact Finance Director Mehr then maybe they could figure out the numbers and where they are. Mayor Vassel told John Fagan that he was having a hard time computing the 31 mill rate without seeing his assessment and his taxes but he told him that he wasn't saying he is wrong. John Fagan said he was saying what he had actually paid for taxes last year versus what he will have to pay this year based on the new mill rate.

Town Manager Gilbert said she completely understands what John Fagan is saying and she said that she would be extremely concerned if she was in the same position. Town Manager Gilbert told John Fagan that he needed to understand that this wasn't the finality and this wasn't just for this evening. The body of the Elected Officials will be reviewing this. Town Manager Gilbert said this budget is the proposed one. The Elected Officials will begin meeting on Wednesday evening and they will be meeting for a series of meetings through May 19, 2014. They will make their "surgical cuts" to the budget. They will bring this to where they feel that they can comfortably present it and adopt it for the electorate of this Town.

John Fagan said he understands this but it sounds to him like he will be disproportionately getting an increase. This is even though his valuation of his house went down slightly actually from the original one. Town Manager Gilbert told John Fagan that she would pull his assessment up and that Finance Director Mehr will do the calculation. This will be provided to all of the Town Council members. John Fagan said thank you.

Councilor MacDonald told John Fagan that he was in "same boat" that he was in and that his assessment actually had gone up. Councilor MacDonald told John Fagan that what he was saying "drives home very hard to him". Councilor MacDonald referred to the number that had

been used for an average home in the presentation and he said he didn't know where that is coming from. He said that is probably some calculation of an average house that really doesn't exist. He told John Fagan that there are hundreds of people like the both of them whose taxes will be going up more than a double digit based on what the preliminary budget is. Councilor MacDonald told John Fagan that in no way does he think this is going to be the budget that is going to end up in front of them at the end. Councilor MacDonald said he is going to do what he can and he knows that the rest of the Councilors will too to reduce the budget to the amount that they need to in order to keep the services they have. Councilor MacDonald told John Fagan that he is hearing exactly where he is coming from. John Fagan said an 18% increase is just not right.

Mayor Vassel asked if there was anyone else from the public who wished to speak. Ron Angelo, 19 Denyelle Drive, R.H., said he will be coming back to more of these public hearings. He referred to Page 117 of the 2014-15 Proposed Budget Book and the contingency reserve. This is showing that this was zero and he thinks this was even before Fiscal Year 2012-13. The adopted amount last year was \$597,650.00. The actual this year was zero and the projection is zero. He then mentioned the department request being \$649,000.00 and he said Town Manager Gilbert increased this to \$849,000.00. Ron Angelo said he wanted to know why this is even there to this extent and why it has been increased because this has been zero for the last several years. He thinks this is one point where he said they can "chop chop". Mayor Vassel said right and he said thank you.

Town Manager Gilbert asked if she could explain what happens with contingency. Mayor Vassel said sure. Town Manager Gilbert said this is a line that can't be touched until after April 1<sup>st</sup> in accordance with the Town Charter. The accounts that are running over or those accounts where raises were given that weren't budgeted for in an account because they were either unknown due to union contracts not being resolved or due to non-bargaining have a series of transfers done to them by the Town Council out of the contingency account. She said this is why these are appearing as a zero. Contingency isn't an account that they actually spend money out of but they transfer money out of this at the time that they need to. This can't be done by herself or by Finance Director Mehr. Town Manager Gilbert said this must be done by the Town Council. Ron Angelo asked Town Manager Gilbert why she had raised this \$200,000.00. Town Manager Gilbert said she did this due to the fact they are trending and they need to set funds aside into their OPEB account to cover the retirements that they are anticipating. She explained some more.

Mayor Vassel asked if there was anyone else from the public who wished to speak. Peter Arico, 28 Maxwell Drive, R.H., thanked the Town Council for all of their efforts in doing a thankless job. He told them that they are a hardworking group of people and they will, without a doubt, be putting many hours into this. He said he has a number of items that he thought bear to be looked at. He told the Town Council that he didn't know if they wanted him to spend the time doing this now or if they just wanted him to go over a few things. He said that he would go over a couple of things that really stood out. The RHPD is requesting some new equipment and it appears to him that there is overlapping equipment that exists. He needs a clarification and he told the Town Council that they should review this. He believes that this is the same thing for the RHFD with regards to upgrading. He mentioned that he isn't opposed to updates and

upgrades but he said most of them have cell phones and two way communications. He asked if these are upgrades and if they are, to what extent. He asked if bids have gone out for these and if this is worthwhile, as well as if it makes sense.

Peter Arico referred to the RHFD. He noticed that a “dramatic big figure” is there for the Chief. He said his specific question is if credit cards are given out to these people. He asked who is accountable for what is spent on the credit cards and to what extent. He told the Town Council that this is their money as well as his.

Peter Arico said they are talking about transferring the custodians. He said this is probably a good idea but he isn't sure and then he said he isn't sure if this is a bad idea. He asked if the supervision from this will be coming from the Facilities Department or if the custodians will be directly under the Board of Education. He questioned what effectiveness they will have and what effectiveness specifically the Board of Education will have. He said the Board of Education wants to maintain better control but he questioned who is going to control them. He asked if the Board of Education is going to have additional people being requested for this.

Peter Arico said two Officers are being requested for the schools. He said the schools are open ten months out of the year and he questioned what these Officers are going to be doing the other two months.

Peter Arico referred to McVicar Field. He had been on the Board of Education at the time that the artificial turf was requested and approved. He thinks that probably this is the worst thing that they ever did because they are looking at replacing this every six to eight years. He mentioned that the fields were made of grass when he was a kid. A little maintenance just had to be given to them and they were as good as new.

Peter Arico said he could go on with more things but he told the Town Council that he didn't know how much time they wanted to allow him. He said these are the things that stand out as far as he can see. They are of great concern to him. He thinks the all-day kindergarten is a good idea. There is a big question as to how effective this is going to be with regards to getting the hardware in place. He told the Town Council that he would leave the rest for another day and he thanked them very much.

Councilor Kochanek thought the reason they had the public here this evening was for things just like this so he said his opinion was if Peter Arico wanted to continue on then for him to do so because this is what they were there for. Mayor Vassel said that people could also submit a long list in writing to the Town Council if they had one. Peter Arico told the Town Council that he knows they are going to be spending a lot of time on this so he said in the interest of time that he would combine a list and forward it to them for consideration. He thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vassel thanked Peter Arico.

Mayor Vassel asked if anyone else from the public wished to speak. There was no one else from the public who wished to.

Councilor Szeps moved to close the Public Hearing on the 2014-2015 Proposed Budget. The motion was seconded by Councilor Moriarty and adopted unanimously by those present. Councilors Casasanta and Drapeau were absent.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

Councilor Moriarty moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vargas and adopted unanimously by those present. Councilors Casasanta and Drapeau were absent.

As there was no further discussion, the public hearing was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica M. Dumas  
Clerk of the Council